Abstract: All too commonly, we see aggressive, bullying individuals in positions of influence and power. The frequency with which we see these kinds of people in the top echelon begs the question: does aggression and bullying help people ascend hierarchies and gain influence? According to dominance theory, the answer is “yes”; individuals can rise up their social ladder by intimidating others and forcing them to defer. Dominance theory has become very popular in the field. It offers an alternative to prestige theory, which proposes that people attain influence by appearing to provide value to their group. In this talk I take a critical look at dominance theory, first arguing why dominance is unlikely to help individuals ascend social hierarchies and gain influence in the long run. I then summarize the evidence cited as supportive of dominance theory, and discuss how it can be explained instead with prestige theory. Finally, I present findings that can help explain why people so commonly believe dominance is an effective route to the top, even when it is not.